



Peaceful And Equitable Societies

HEKS/EPER Global Cooperation's strategy, promising practices, achievements and perspectives on peaceful and equitable societies.

Why Improved Relationships And Peace Matter

Global Challenges – Context

Studies predict a high likelihood that by 2030 more than 80% of the world poorest will live in fragile contexts¹. And broad database shows the worrying trends in global conflict². While in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s, more violent conflicts ended than new ones broke out, this ratio was reversed since 2010. At the same time, since then there has also been an increase in the number of terrorist attacks, war deaths and violent expulsions. These trends led to the situation that in 2016, more countries were affected by war situations than at any time in the past 30 years. Moreover, today's violent situations last longer, have regional dimensions, involve growing numbers of non-state violent actors and increasingly affect middle-income countries.

Causes for this trend are the change in global power relations, the increasingly unequal wealth distribution and the new growth of countries striving for a redistribution of political spheres of influence³. At the global level, wealth inequality has risen sharply since 1980, despite strong growth in some countries like e.g. China. Inequality has increased in nearly all world regions in recent decades, but at different speeds. The fact that inequality levels are so different among countries, even when countries share similar levels of development, highlights the important roles that societal structures and corresponding national policies play in shaping inequality⁴.



Zimbabwe: Speaking out for peace and human rights.

It is social and economic inequalities that persist and, in many cases, have worsened. Virtually everywhere, some individuals and groups confront barriers that prevent them from fully participating in economic, social and political life. There are strong links between socio economic exclusion and armed conflict and as it may create conditions under which violent conflicts escalate.⁵ This can range from civil unrest to violent armed conflict to terrorist activity.⁶ Seriously disadvantaged groups with common characteristics (such as ethnicity or religion) can resort to violent conflict to assert their rights and eliminate inequalities. Xenophobic and racist extremism and the rise of populism and nationalist politics in many parts of the world cause insecurity and polarization within and between countries. At the same time, such crises are often linked with socio-economic situation of the countries and the inter-relationship with individuals' economic situation. Group differences alone are not enough to trigger conflict, but social exclusion and horizontal inequalities provide fertile ground for violent mobilization.

It is social relationships between individuals and especially between different groups of people that determine the question of equality. Equality is neither an idea of defining patterns of distribution nor an ideal of eliminating elements of misfortune in people's lives.⁷ Rather equality is a concept that applies to social relationships. Understanding and improving relationships is therefore key vehicle to promote peaceful and equitable societies.

¹ States of Fragility 2018.

² <https://gsdrc.org/topic-guides/social-exclusion/dynamics/exclusion-as-a-cause-and-consequence-of-violent-conflict/>

³ Speech Franck Bousquet, Senior Director, Fragility, Conflict & Violence Group UN Security Council Briefing, New York

⁴ Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict, World Bank Group, 2018

⁵ <https://wid.world/data/>

⁶ 2016 Report on the World Social Situation, <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/report-on-the-world-social-situation-rwss-social-policy-and-development-division/rwss2016.html>

⁷ <https://gsdrc.org/topic-guides/social-exclusion/dynamics/exclusion-as-a-cause-and-consequence-of-violent-conflict/>

⁷ Hee-Kang Kim 2006, Equality as an evaluation of social relations in: Public Affairs Quarterly Vol. 20, No. 4 (Oct 2006), pp. 313-328

How HEKS/EPER responds – Strategy

Respectful relationships between different identity groups and social cohesion within excluded groups, are indispensable for overcoming discrimination. As experience has shown, successful economic development does not automatically enable affected communities and states to overcome social conflicts and their violent escalation.⁸ As an example, unequal access to land and natural resources is often a trigger for conflict between and within different identity groups and, on the other hand, sound relationships facilitate the good governance of land and natural resources. Furthermore, enhancing policies and practices promoting justice needs strong relationships between different, sometimes fragmented disenfranchised groups as well as vertical structures for lobbying and advocacy.

HEKS/EPER strives towards enhancing the **quality of relationships**. It invests in triggering initiatives towards mutual acceptance and peaceful living together through reflection on the advantages of diversity and mutual respect. Common visions and a sense of belonging create identity while different individual and sociocultural backgrounds are appreciated and constructive relationships between different people are built. Joint experiences and narratives determine the level of trust between individuals and groups. Relationships between different identity groups, within identity groups (including gender relations) and between hierarchies, embrace a certain culture of communication, attitudes towards mutual appreciation and values concerning power, difference and equality. Relationships are more than links between individuals, groups, entities or state government civil society connections. They are instead about mutual understanding of what the relationship is about. Identity, societal values, including values on power distribution, equality, peace and justice are the factors that determine inclusion and exclusion as well as the psychological well-being of a society. The quality of relationships between groups is often equally important to material aspects of well-being and is linked in many ways.

Improving relationships builds on enhancing attitudes, values behaviours/practices of individuals, groups, rights-holders and duty-bearers towards peace and justice. HEKS/EPER is **focusing on horizontal and vertical relationships**. This includes relationships a) between different discriminated and excluded groups; b) between different discriminated and excluded groups and mainstream society c) between different discriminated and excluded groups and duty-bearers and d) fragmentation within communities which hinder



Cambodia: HEKS/EPER is fostering positive relationships between different social groups and neighbouring villages.

empowerment and advocacy vis a vis powerholders. As vertical relationships, enhancing meaningful participation of disenfranchised groups in national as well as international multi-stakeholder initiatives can be key.

Means towards improving relationships: The lack of contact, negative past experience and distrust, stereotypes, hate speech and conflict-supporting narratives hinder necessary cooperation and foster discrimination and exclusion. Thus, creating missing links, enabling contact, deconstructing negative stereotypes and narratives, and focusing on joint aims and values enhance cooperation and develop healthy relationships. Furthermore, creating or reforming mechanisms to deal with grievances helps overcome mistrust and thus fosters cooperation. As a result, establishing mutually respectful and longstanding relationships helps overcome institutional discrimination. However, we may be careful in improving relationship in asymmetric conflicts and a rights-based lens is key in all planning and implementation processes. Working on improved relationship shall not cover inequalities and human rights violations. Finally, trustful and transparent relationships of mutual respect create an enabling space for civil society and a foundation for sustainable economies.

⁸ Pathways for peace, 2018 and ACT/IDS 2019, The impact of shrinking space on the SDGs, Geneva.

Promising Practices Worldwide

HEKS/EPER diapraxis approach

One particular strategy towards improving relationships, HEKS/EPER is exploring since more than a decade, is the 'diapraxis approach'. Diapraxis means dialogue through practice. Diapraxis is a methodology designed to contribute to nonviolent transformation and prevention of conflict. The HEKS/EPER diapraxis approach refers to interlinkages between 'classical' development work, such as livelihoods or rural development activities, and conflict transformation endeavors.

The /EPER diapraxis approach combines practical work, such as vegetable gardening, towards joint aims, such as increased income, in order to enhance positive relationships. A joint goal and joint practical work are the means to enhance trust and having antagonistic groups living together in peace. This concept can be applied to counter conflicts within smaller communities as well as between broader identity groups. Efforts in this regard include the provision of space for exchange and the deconstruction of stereotypes which are often used as instruments for martial propaganda.

A diapraxis approach can be used to prevent violence in situation where grievances are felt to some extent but have not yet turned into severe emotions of mutual suspicion or even hatred. However, the approach is also applicable after more open violence between groups has surfaced and thus be used as a mediation strategy. In the recent past, HEKS/EPER has explored to integrate the diapraxis approach into its Humanitarian Aid work, thus expanding the concept towards a 'triple nexus' to create connections between humanitarian, development and peace actors. The diapraxis approach as it has been used in the past in HEKS/EPER's programming combines development and service delivery with conflict prevention and mitigation. In this sense, the diapraxis approach is one mean to implement the triple nexus in HEKS/EPER International Programme (for more information about the implementation of the triple nexus within HEKS/EPER, please check the [HEKS/EPER Triple Nexus Guidance 2022](#)).



Bangladesh: Bringing Adivasi together with Bangladeshi majority society through joint business interests openings windows of dialogue.

South Sudan – Humanitarian aid, development and peace – diapraxis towards a triple nexus

The general situation of South Sudan is known to many, but very little is understood about the complexity of the conflict and grief in key hot belts like Yei River state. The level of traumata, bitterness, insecurity, suspicions, fear, anger, crave for vengeance and trust deficits between the affected communities and the government forces are omnipresent. The situation deteriorated in July 2016, and a large number of people were killed when Yei became the corridor of escape for Riek Machar's faction. Consequently, Yei became a garrison confined to just 10 km radius while opposition armed groups occupied the surrounding areas. A needs assessment conducted by our partner MDO in October 2017 indicated that 31% of the population was food insecure, 57% survived on one meal per day, and 12% could not predict where their next meal would come from or when. RECONCILE and MDO (HEKS/EPER partners) respond to the crisis with a holistic approach that puts relationships needed towards a common future at the centre. The project's overall objective is to contribute to more stable and resilient communities in Yei Town through reconciliation and livelihood recovery.

Relationship in focus: A: Civilians and Military; B: Ethnic Dinka and other ethnic groups; Mundari cattle keepers and indigenous crop farmers.

Quality of the relationship at the beginning of the endeavour:

The government militia groups – *Mathiang-Anyor* composed of ethnic Dinka and SPLA (South Sudan People's Army) distrusted civilians from other ethnic groups within South Sudan. This led to serious human rights violations such as levied allegations against civilians as being rebel supporters, unlawful arrests, torture, looting of properties, and killings. This again created fear, hatred, and resentment among the civil



South Sudan: Promoting social cohesion in war-torn Yei town.

population in Yei against all military groups as well as against Dinkas. Leading to hate speech, the breakup of mixed marriages, traumata, the isolation of the army, the exclusion of Dinka people from social functions, markets, etc., and revenge attacks and killings of the Dinka. Altogether, the civil population, regardless of its origin suffered the consequences of the ethnic-political conflict in South Sudan. The relocation of armed cattle keeping tribes, in search of water and pasture, led to violent conflicts between cattle keepers and farmers, with multitudinous killings of people and animals, burning of fields and houses. Thereupon, the government military set up garrisons and checkpoints all round Yei town, barring humanitarian access as well as access to social services and markets to the trapped population in Yei town and surroundings. This even increased insecurity and violence and further worsened the situations as communities with no clear access to basic needs like food, health services, etc.

Capacities for peace: The project capitalized on the demand for affordable food as an essential common interest. With all the population concentrated within the town area, the outskirts of the town had high potential and adequate land for food production and animal rearing. The involvement of government authorities was key to ensure that communities were granted safe access to the farms in their neighbourhood to allow them to cultivate for themselves some food to sustain their lives as well as graze their livestock safely without infringing on the crops.

Agreed joint practical aim: Enhancement of rules and regulations which allow an increased food production.

Working mode: Trauma healing and conflict transformation consultations for community leaders and representatives and radio talk shows and dialogues meetings provided the ground for the different groups of actors to collaborate. Through continuous lobbying and quiet diplomacy our partner RECONCILE facilitated the process towards the evacuation of the army from the civilian sites thereby securing farm plots at the outskirts of the town for farmers to produce food jointly and safely. Furthermore, the project supported the community efforts through seeds and tools provision, farmer trainings in best agronomic practices.

Achieved, expected and desired change in the quality of the relationship: After a conflict transformation training for community leaders had been conducted, the local chiefs of the affected communities were mobilised. RECONCILE and MDO held community dialogues with the nomadic pastoralists and government agencies to agree on the best working modalities to promote peaceful coexistence. During this dialogue it was decided that the available land would be divided into two parts, so that the cattle herders could graze and grow their crops without disturbing each other. The army agreed to closed illegal checkpoints to allow civilians freedom of movement and safe access to farmland and production corridors. Subsequently IDPs, returnees, and host communities, gained secure access to 2,369 acres (5,922.5 ha) of land for food and seed multiplication/production⁷² IDPs (including 15 nomadic pastoralists - Mundari), 50 hosts, and 13 returnees worked together to increase production and revitalize local seed production.

On the whole, the project strengthened the capacity of community leaders (both traditional leaders/chiefs such as local chiefs, landowners, religious leaders, as well as representatives of women's/mothers' and youth forums and local government agencies) with skills and knowledge on how to resolve conflicts through non-violent means.

Through the project's support, the youth were trained in conflict transformation and formed mixed groups/clubs or forums (with members from different ethnic groups, both civilian and military, IDPs, returnees, and hosts) to participate in socio-cultural activities (sports tournaments and cultural galas). These activities provided an opportunity for them to interact with each other, better understand each other, build trust, discuss their long-standing grievances, and develop a common understanding to work as a team toward a common goal. The change in attitudes was evident in the reduction of violent attacks in the streets directed at specific ethnic groups.

Achievements & Perspectives

Achievements 2021

Contributing to rural development and peacebuilding, HEKS/EPER has been promoting a holistic approach that aims to exhaust synergies between the different fields of work for almost a decade. HEKS/EPER's country staff is committed to address key drivers of conflict with a diapraxis approach in programmes and projects. It is often conflict sensitivity demands that have been the starting point to enhance the focus on social relationship while showing opportunities to strengthen classical development goals simultaneously.

One of the examples of applying diapraxis approach is a joint action in rural commune of Droum, department of Mirriah, Niger presented by partner ZAMTAPO. The area is affected by severe resource conflicts between nomadic pastoralists and settled farmers, as well as residents, internally displaced people and refugees from neighbouring Nigeria and Chad. The diapraxis and the joint management of the village grazing area improves social cohesion between communities and the different groups. This action involves about 400 most vulnerable people (women heads of households, widows and men who have little or no income).



Niger: Bringing the different interest groups of sedentary farmers and nomadic cattle breeders together to jointly decide on how to regulate access to land and water ensures not only a peaceful conflict resolution, but contributes to improved income and livelihood.

This is HEKS/EPER

HEKS/EPER is the aid organization of the Swiss protestant churches and operates toward a more equitable and peaceful world with resilient communities, supporting in 2021 with 58 projects in Switzerland about 602'000 people, and with 163 projects in 28 countries 1.173 M people directly in economic and social need. The operating income of the whole organization has risen to 98.8 M CHF and expenditure to 89.2 M – of which 45.3 M were costs for the international programme.

In the Global Cooperation division, HEKS/EPER ameliorated with 13.8 M (net costs) spent on 93 **development** projects the life of 612'900 people focusing on access to land and resources, securing basic services, fostering sustainable production, and inclusive market systems. It promoted also the social inclusion of marginalized, inclusive governance structures and conflict transformation. About 10.1 M benefitted indirectly – e.g., through successful advocacy for new rights (e.g., to land, water, education, health) or de facto access to territories for big communities.

HEKS/EPER's **humanitarian aid** was supported with 16.3 M CHF 44 projects reaching directly 528'184 M people affected by conflicts and disasters, another 4.476 M were reached indirectly with campaigns of health prevention or rebuilt public infrastructure.

In the frame of **Church Cooperation** HEKS/EPER enabled with 2.1 M CHF social work of Reformed Churches in Eastern Europe and the Middle East reaching out with 22 projects to 32'000 people.

HEKS/EPER strives towards systemic change with its human rights-based approach, also promoting ownership, innovation, and the nexus between humanitarian aid and development activities. Together with competent partners and well-interconnected alliances HEKS/EPER fosters constant dialogue between civil society, private sector, and Government actors enabling people and communities to advocate for their needs and rights. The international divisions' conflict- and gender-sensitive programming is risk-informed and evidence-based. A proficient institutional governance framework allows effectiveness and transparency. In 2021, 166.3 staff members (full-time equivalent) worked for development offices, 140.4 for HA delegations – 30 FTE at HQ in Switzerland.


In Switzerland, HEKS/EPER supported with 29.7 M CHF 60 projects in 15 cantons disadvantaged people in becoming socially and economically integrated by promoting equal opportunity and assisting jobless people, refugees, and other individuals by providing day structures, legal advice, vocational training, language courses, dialogue platforms, etc.

Strategies, policies, guidelines, reports published on ID's Governance Website: https://en.heks.ch/Institutional_Governance

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